



Research

(from RAWIK Radio Aus- und Weiterbildung im Interkulturellen Kontext)

Journalistic research means independently obtaining information, rather than just processing press releases, agency material or press conferences.

Journalistic research involves gathering information which is as diverse as possible, so as to shed light on a particular topic from different and conflicting points of view. All information which is included in journalistic work should be backed up by research. If it is impossible to check the information, the source must be specified.

Important: work thoroughly!

1st question: Is there some truth in it?

Is what you have heard correct? First, you need to become acquainted with the topic yourself, because only if you have background information, can you ask well-directed questions. Has information already been published on the topic? What relevant information can be found in archives, on the Internet, in statistics, etc.?

Now that you are well acquainted with the topic, you can reach for the telephone and ask well-directed questions, request figures, etc.

If systematic inquiries show that what I have heard is wrong, the research ends and there is no story! If there really is some truth in it, the research continues with the question of why this is the case.

2nd question: What is missing?

Now the task is to sift through the research material, to make selections and to check whether the statements are clear and thus quotable. A decision has to be made as to whether this material can be used for a news story or an item with original sound. This is followed by interviews, e.g. with statisticians who interpret figures, with scientists who provide possible explanations and with affected parties who report on their experiences.

Planning the research

When conducting research, it is important to proceed systematically and to think about what it actually is that you need to find out. A central thread is a useful aid for delimiting the topic and avoiding getting bogged down in details when researching.

Experts, scientists, archives, libraries, databases, independent observers and people affected all serve as sources of information for research.

The gathered information helps to determine the lines of conflict and to get to know the various positions, perspectives and interests. Sometimes, the focus of the research can also shift while it is being conducted. A decision must then be made, as to which sources can be of further help in answering the changed questions.

Listen to different sides of the story!

There are several sides to every problem – and these should be considered during research work. The journalist must decide which perspective to adopt. They need to become aware of their own perspective and think about how much weight to give to individual sources and opinions.

Possible sources of knowledge

- How things appear at the scene.
- Telephone conversations and meetings with: people directly affected, people indirectly affected by an event or situation, experts, authorities, citizens' initiative groups, interest groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), parties, associations, etc.
- Newspaper reports, electronic media, the Internet, databases, statistics and congressional reports.
- Archives, e.g. newspaper archives, university libraries, specialist literature, Swiss Federal Archives and Swiss Social Archives.
- Telephone books (or electronic telephone directories), Publicus, Swiss state calendar, directories of trade associations, reference texts etc.
- Information at public offices, e.g.: commercial register, residents' registration offices, post offices (who is behind a PO box address or a postal giro account?), land registry offices, tax offices, road traffic departments, debt enforcement offices, courts, municipal authorities and town authorities.

Sources

Interaudio (2006). Materialien für die interkulturelle Radioausbildung (Material for Intercultural Radio Training). Planung und Gestaltung einer Magazinsendung. Antje Schwarzmeier and Ulrike Werner. Hessische Landesanstalt für privaten Rundfunk (LPR Hessen).

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